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Exploring ELF Features in Dutch Teenagers' Online Communication

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Abstract

ELF communication is a widespread phenomenon. Since Dutch teenagers often use English online, this study was focused on their encounters with ELF features with regard to difficulties and strategies. Twenty-four Dutch teenagers were interviewed about their use of English in online situations. These situations include both speaking and chatting as interaction. Furthermore, they were interviewed about their ELT classroom situation with reference to the focus in the classes and attention to varieties of English. This study found that Dutch teenagers encounter ELF features in online communication. Furthermore, respondents indicated that in their ELT classes, the focus often lies on native-speaker models and grammar, which creates a contrast between the ELT classes and outside-classroom communication.

Introduction

“English is a striking example of a language that has overflowed the boundaries of its original region” (Mauranen, 2018, p. 2). It is an often-chosen language for international communication. Situations in which English is chosen as a language for communication include ones in which no native speakers (NSs) of English are present. The number of non-native speakers (NNSs) of English worldwide is moreover increasing at a fast rate (Sifakis, 2014, p. 320). Therefore, English is often used as a lingua franca (Watterson, 2008). The term “lingua franca” refers to “the specialized use of a language as a medium of communication between people of different first language backgrounds” (Kaur, 2010, p. 193). When English is used as a lingua franca, some scholars refer to it as “English as a Lingua Franca”, or ELF (Walker & Zoghbor, 2015).

English has gained its popularity as a foreign language in the Netherlands after World War II. It is nowadays used in many domains, including in education (Edwards, 2014a). In the Netherlands, English is a mandatory subject for all students in every level of secondary school (Edwards, 2014b). But Dutch teenagers do not only use the English language in school. Many Dutch teenagers are exposed to English on a daily basis (West & Verspoor, 2016). According to Verspoor et al. (2010), this exposure usually takes place outside the classroom. Grau (2009) argues that this exposure can have consequences for English teaching since the use of English in teenagers’ free time can be in intense contrast with the English that is used in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to investigate Dutch teenagers’ use of English in online situations and to explore their opinions and perspectives with respect to their English classes in secondary school. These issues will be explored within this study.

Theoretical Background

The study of English as a lingua franca is a relatively new research domain, but it has taken its position within the English research field (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Jenks, 2012; Mauranen, 2018). In the early 2000's, some ELF researchers believed it would be possible to describe and codify varieties of ELF as if these varieties could be viewed as a language on its own (Jenkins, 2015). However, their ideas received some criticism from other scholars, for example from Modiano (2009) and Kaur (2010). Therefore, it has been suggested that ELF should not be seen as a language in itself: "ELF does not exist as a "thing" or "system" out there" (Firth, 2009, p. 163). Jenkins (2015, p. 55) also notes that ELF is "beyond description". It is not likely that any sort of codification of ELF can be created (Sifakis et al., 2018, p. 156). Mauranen (2018, p. 3) puts it as "there is no obvious, distinct speech community that maintains English as a Lingua Franca". Thus, while the lingua franca use of English is a worldwide phenomenon, a single variety of ELF does not exist (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Ishikawa & Jenkins, 2019).

Several definitions of ELF have been proposed. A quite recent definition is "multilingual communication in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen" by Jenkins (2015, p. 73). Jenkins pleads for repositioning ELF and seeing it as "English as a Multilingua Franca" since each speaker brings their own native language with them in ELF communication (2015, p. 74-75). She also observed that multilingualism is a significant feature within ELF communication, or even the norm, which is why she added this element to her definition. Cogo and Dewey (2012) propose a similar definition. They define ELF as "any interaction where English is the preferred option for intercultural communication, where it is spoken predominantly (but by no means exclusively) among expanding circle speakers who usually do not share another language" (p. 12). Cogo and Dewey refer to Kachru's (1985) three circles in their definition. The expanding circle represents the countries in which English is used as a foreign language (Melchers & Shaw,

2011, p. 197). Cogo and Dewey (2012) do, however, acknowledge that speakers from all three circles can participate in ELF communication. Within ELF interactions, native speakers of English are not necessarily excluded (Walker & Zoghbor, 2015, p. 434). One can speak of monolingual or multilingual users of ELF (Jenkins, 2015). Cogo (2009) and Mauranen (2018) furthermore mention that many ELF speakers are at least bilingual, which means that they have access to several languages, codes or varieties. Speakers show features of their first language in their additional language(s), for example in pronunciation and lexis (Mauranen, 2018, p. 4). Mauranen (2018, p. 4) uses the term ‘similects’, with which she refers to e.g. the type of English spoken by native speakers of Dutch, which is sometimes called “Dunglish”. According to her, ELF communication can thus be called a result of contact between similects. Walker and Zoghbor (2015) furthermore mention that a speaker’s first language can influence the way they pronounce words and thus their accent. Therefore, Walker and Zoghbor (2015, p. 436) consider non-native accents to be normal and hard to be refrained from. Within ELF communication, as Walker and Zoghbor (2015, p. 436) suggest, mutual intelligibility is often prioritized. Deterding (2013) also argues that communication is only successful when intelligibility is reached (p. 2) and that ELF interactants do their best to ensure this (p. 5). A speaker’s accent does not necessarily have to influence their intelligibility; a speaker with a strong accent might still be easy to understand (Derwing & Munro, 2009).

Earliest studies to ELF were focused on forms as pronunciation and lexicogrammar. A change of emphasis cropped up and attention to underlying processes, as accommodation, was more frequently demonstrated (Jenkins, 2015, p. 50). Accommodation is a phenomenon that describes the different ways in which a person can adapt or alter their speech to facilitate communication (Cogo, 2009, p. 254). Through this, one can establish intelligibility but also show solidarity. Examples of accommodation are use of repetition, code-switching, and self-

rephrasing. These strategies can be used to attain efficiency and demonstrate cooperation (Cogo, 2009). Accommodation can be an important tool to obtain mutual understanding (Ishikawa & Jenkins, 2019, p. 2). Cooperation can be a strategy within accommodation. It can be shown through speakers who appropriate words from their interlocutor (Firth, 2009). Cogo (2009, p. 263) notes that code-switching is often seen as “a learner strategy that lower proficiency learners may adopt to compensate for their linguistic deficiency” within Second-Language Acquisition (SLA) research. However, within ELF communication, code-switching can be interpreted as multilingual competence. Repetition can be used to signal or restore a non-understanding (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Mauranen (2018, p. 11) also mentions accommodation as a feature of ELF communication. Furthermore, she mentions simplification and leveling as ELF features.

Walker and Zoghbor (2015) discuss the Communication Accommodation Theory. Three factors are part of this theory: convergence, divergence, and maintenance. This theory can help to analyze how Dutch teenagers use accommodation within their English interactions. Accommodation plays a significant role in obtaining mutual intelligibility (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). They argue that when a speaker adjusts their pronunciation to their interlocutor, intelligibility will be ensured with more significance. Cogo and Dewey (2012) furthermore discuss convergence with regard to accommodation. They mention that the speaker should be able to adapt (which includes productive convergence), while the listener needs to do their best to “develop greater tolerance of difference” (which includes receptive convergence) (p. 103). Thus, as Cogo and Dewey (2012) suggest, both productive convergence and receptive convergence are essential within accommodation. Accepting non-standard forms is a component of receptive convergence. Cogo and Dewey (2012, p. 104) conclude that interlocutors within ELF communication usually do not comment on non-standard forms. Deterding (2013, p. 14) suggests this as well. Deterding furthermore (2013, p.

5) mentions that ELF interactants often do not feel bound to native-speaker models: they use the language in a creative way. Successful communication is commonly prioritized over use of standard forms within ELF interaction (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Deterding (2013, p. 5) agrees with this; he says that interactants pay more attention to getting their message across than to use of standard grammar. Divergence, as also discussed by Walker and Zoghbor (2015), is a way in which interlocutors can express their own identity while they make a distinction between their identity and that of the person with whom they are communicating (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 102). While it is often argued that speakers of ELF use accommodation strategies, Jenks (2012) on the contrary mentions that ELF interactants sometimes avoid building consensus and being supportive. He points out that interactants within chatrooms sometimes highlight errors or non-standard forms uttered by other speakers.

Within ELF communication, misunderstandings and non-understandings between interlocutors can occur. Speakers can use a range of communication strategies (CS) to find a solution for these problems. A definition for CS is “an attempt to express meaning when faced with difficulty in the L2” (Gass et al., 2013, p. 257). These strategies can ensure that the problem will not cause a communication-breakdown to turn into a communication conflict (Meeuwis, 1994 in Watterson, 2008, p. 380-81). According to Watterson (2008, p. 381), “participants directly cooperate to overcome these problems”. A definition of a non-understanding can be “when the listener realizes that s/he cannot make sense of (part of) an utterance” (Bremer, 1996 in Watterson, 2008, p. 384) This definition is also used by Cogo and Dewey (2012). When interlocutors do not realize that they interpreted the speaker wrongly, it is called a misunderstanding instead of a non-understanding (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Pietikäinen, 2018). When listeners realize that a non-understanding occurs, they can indicate that they did not understand the speaker by, for example, asking for clarification (Pietikäinen, 2018, p. 189). There are several indicators for non-understandings according to Varonis and

Gass's (1985) tripartite model. These indicators are the following: echo, explicit statement of non-understanding, no verbal response, and inappropriate response (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 118). Gass et al. (2013, p. 257) argue that there are several CS that can be used to repair non-understandings. They mention approximation, literal translation, code-switching, and avoidance. CS can be applied before and after the non-understanding occurs. For example, a speaker can think about their choice of words before realizing their utterance, which can be considered a pre-realization strategy (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 127). An after-realization strategy is about negotiating the non-understanding, for example when the listener addresses it (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 120). Cogo and Dewey (2012) suggest that these strategies are often used within ELF communication. A common cause for non-understandings is an interlocutor's pronunciation (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Meierkord (2012) proposes that communication between two NNSs might run more smoothly than communication between a NS and a NNS. Deterding (2013) also mentions that ELF interactants might have problems with understanding NSs and that NSs are more likely to comment on non-standard forms than NNSs (p. 14).

Within the Netherlands, the primary focus in English education often lies on British English (Edwards, 2014b, p. 86). ELF research has motivated English Language Teaching (ELT) scholars to "problematize ELT learning, testing and curriculum designing" (Sifakis, 2014, p. 318). Mauranen (2018) mentions that many SLA researchers are reluctant to let go of the monolingual ideal. Walker and Zoghbor (2015) also note that many ELT goals are set on the assumption of a native-speaker listener. Many ELF researchers plead for a shift away from the native-speaker standard within ELT classrooms, for example Watterson (2008), Meierkord (2012), Cogo and Dewey (2012), Sifakis (2014), Sifakis et al. (2018), and Ishikawa and Jenkins (2019). Exposing students to variety within English is important, according to Matsumoto (2011), since this exposure could make sure that students are

knowledgeable about the international aspect of English. Matsumoto (2011, p. 98) also suggests that students should be exposed to the differences that exist in English speakers' accents, to stimulate the development of their accommodation skills with regard to phonology. Competence and proficiency should no longer be related to a speaker's adherence to a native-speaker model of English according to Cogo and Dewey (2012). They plead for a reconsideration of what is seen as competence or proficiency in ELT. Jenkins (2011) redefines "a skilled English user" in the quote below:

... a skilled English user is no longer someone who has mastered the forms of a particular native variety of English, but someone who has acquired the pragmatic skills needed to adapt their English use in line with the demands of the current LF situation. (p. 931-932)

Firth (2009, p. 163) states something similar, saying that "competence in ELF does not entail mastery of a standardized form". Consequently, as Jenkins (2011) suggests, learners of English should be informed about the existing variety within English. Sifakis et al. (2018) discuss the implications of ELF-awareness within the ELT classroom. An ELF-aware approach in the classroom can ensure a shift away from the monolingual standard of learning English as a second or foreign language. Since ELF is not a fixed variety, an ELF-aware perspective in the classroom would require a view of English as a social practice, as Sifakis et al. (2018, p. 160) suggest. However, it can be a challenge for ELT teachers to integrate ELF into their classes, for example because of "teachers' resistance to change" (Sifakis, 2014, p. 325) and since "teachers tend to ascribe pedagogical value only to standard varieties" (Sifakis et al., 2018, p. 158). The teachers that are interested in incorporating ELF into their classroom do often not know how to do this (Sifakis, 2014, p. 323-24). Sifakis (2014) therefore calls for appropriate teacher training, through introducing ELF literature to ELT teachers and asking them to compare their own experiences to the literature.

Meierkord (2012, p. 13) notes that informal communication in, for example, internet-based chatrooms can also contain use of ELF. Since Dutch teenagers often use English in their free time (Grau, 2009; West & Verspoor, 2016), it is likely that they also encounter ELF features when they communicate with peers who have a different first language background, for example on social media or through live gaming. They might encounter difficulties, as non-understandings, and apply CS to solve these problems. So far, it has not been researched if Dutch teenagers encounter ELF features in online communication. To investigate whether Dutch teenagers come across features of ELF and notice these, this study is built on interviews with Dutch teenagers to explore their experiences with regard to ELF interactions and features. Consequently, the focus for this research will be on Dutch teenagers' use of English and their use and recognition of ELF features in an online setting. To investigate this subject, the first research question will be: what features of ELF communication do Dutch teenagers encounter within online communication, when using English to interact with people who have a different L1-background? This study will also explore if Dutch teenagers experience a difference in their use of English when they compare their online use in their free time and the use within the classroom. Many ELF researchers give implications on how ELF could be incorporated in the classroom. It is important to find out how Dutch teenagers feel about this, so that their opinion can be taken into account when scholars and teachers consider possible changes within the ELT classroom in the Netherlands. This will be covered by research question two: do Dutch teens experience a difference in their encounters with ELF features when comparing outside and inside classroom situations?

Method

Interviews

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 teenagers aged 13 to 18 with a mean age of 16. They were all native

speakers of Dutch who live in the Netherlands. Twenty-three of them were in secondary school and one was in the first year of her HBO-program. These respondents had been approached and asked to participate on social media and through social and academic network contacts. In the beginning of the search for respondents, the respondents were asked if they knew a person who could also participate. Thus, a use of snowball sampling also provided respondents (Boeije, 2010). When the respondents were approached, they were told that this research was focused on teenagers who use English in an online setting. If they believed they met this requirement, they could agree with participating in this research by doing one interview via chatting that would take 30 to 40 minutes. Eventually, many interviews turned out to take an hour. When the respondents were approached, they were told that participating would be anonymous and voluntarily and that their answers would be used for a study that investigates Dutch teenagers' use of English. This request for participation can be found in appendix I. Through this, informed consent was established (Boeije, 2010). This research was focused on Dutch teens who use English in their free time in an online setting. Therefore, when searching for respondents, a targeted selection was used (Boeije, 2010). This means that exclusively teens who use English in an online setting were interviewed. Because of Covid-19, the interviews were not held in a face-to-face setting. Instead, they were all held through chatting, e.g. via WhatsApp or Discord.

Based on themes and theories that arose from literature research, a topic list and interview questions were formed (appendix II). Examples of these themes are use of English online, problems that arise when English is used online, solutions and strategies used to solve these problems, use of English in school, and suggestions for changes in English teaching at school. The results from the interviews were used to build a picture of how Dutch teenagers think they use English in an online environment, whether they encounter features of ELF, and what the school situation with regard to English teaching is according to Dutch teenagers.

Through asking open questions, the respondents were encouraged to consider their use of English and speak freely about their experiences. It was important that their answers were related to their use of English in an online setting and not to a face-to-face setting. When needed, the respondents were asked to clarify or confirm their answers through closed questions. Since all respondents were native speakers of Dutch, the interviews were conducted in Dutch. Quotes from the interviews that are used in the results section of this study are translated from Dutch to English, which was done by the researcher.

Amongst other things, the respondents were asked about their use of English in an online setting, with whom they communicate, the native languages of the people they communicate with, and the problems and solutions they encounter when communicating in English. These elements concern research question one. The respondents were also asked about their use of English within the classroom, the varieties of English addressed and used within the classroom, and if they had wishes for changes in their English classes. These elements concern research question two. The respondents were told that they could either answer the questions through text messages or that they could send a voice-message with their answer. The interviews were transcribed through copying the chats and pasting them in a Microsoft Word document. In the transcripts, ‘I’ stands for ‘interviewer’ and ‘Rx’ stands for ‘respondent’ and their assigned number. Typos or spelling-errors were not corrected in the transcripts. Personal information that could enable readers to trace back the respondents was anonymized.

It is important to note that several linguistic terms could arise when the respondents were asked about their encounters with ELF features. However, the majority of Dutch teenagers is not familiar with linguistic terms. Therefore, the interview questions were formulated in a way that they were understandable for the respondents, but still refer to ELF features.

Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to obtain the results. This involved two phases of coding. In the first phase, the relevant data were labeled using comments in Microsoft Word. Examples of these codes are “interaction”, “difficulties”, “strategies”, “attitudes” and “school”. The second phase of coding was carried out through axial coding, to establish which elements in the results were the most important and which were less so. This second phase was also used to link the results to the consulted theory (Boeije, 2010).

Reliability and validity

Within this research, several steps have been taken to guarantee reliability and validity (Boeije, 2010). To ensure reliability, the interviewer aimed to make the respondents feel comfortable. Since the interviews were not held in a face-to-face situation, the respondents were able to do the interview in a situation in which they feel safe and secure. This removed stress from the respondents, which could lead to more reliable answers. The interviewer asked open questions whenever this was possible to not influence the respondents’ answers. Asking open questions also ensured that the respondents were able to talk about their own experiences. The high number of participants and the fact that they often use English in online situations ensures representativity.

To protect validity, a topic list was created based on consulted and appropriate literature. This topic list ensured that the interviews were focused on this study’s research questions.

Results

The results of this research are organized within a coding table, which can be found in appendix III. Twenty-four Dutch teenagers have been interviewed and these interviews have been analyzed. Fifteen of these respondents indicated that they communicate in English through speaking in an online setting. Twenty-two communicate in English through chatting.

Fifteen respondents use both ways to communicate online. The respondents communicate with both NSs and NNSs of English. Most NS interlocutors were people from the United States or England. NNS interlocutors came from many different countries, for example Spain, Germany, and France. Some respondents answered that they often do not know where their interlocutors come from or what their native language is. It was quite remarkable that three respondents indicated that they communicate in English with friends who also have Dutch as their native language, which means that it is not necessary for them to communicate in English. Two respondents eventually indicated that they never use English in an active way. They figured they would meet the requirements for this research since they do use English in passive ways, for example through reading English texts online or watching English videos online. These two respondents could naturally still be interviewed about how well they understand speakers and what their situation with respect to English education at school is.

Gaming

Twelve respondents said that they use English to communicate with people when they play videogames. They often speak with other players, they communicate through chat, or they use both. Nine of these 12 respondents indicated that they communicate with fellow players through speaking, 12 of the 12 respondents communicate through chat and nine use both.

Social media

Sixteen respondents use English when they are active on social media, for example on Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Skype. Nine of these 16 communicate in English through speaking. This could happen via Skype or WhatsApp (video)calling. Fourteen respondents communicate in English using chat and nine use both ways for online communication in English. Two of the 16 respondents who said that they use social media

when communicating in English do not use English in an active way, which means that they do not produce text or speech in English to communicate.

Difficulties

The respondents described several difficulties that they encounter when they communicate in English online. Many difficulties occur during chatting as well as speaking. However, some difficulties appear to occur specifically in one of the two circumstances. The difficulties that were mentioned are divided into two main groups: the difficulties that the respondents said they caused themselves and the difficulties that were caused by the interlocutor, according to the respondent. Within this research, difficulties that arise when the respondents communicate with NNSs have been distinguished from the difficulties that arise when the respondents communicate with NSs of English. It is also important to note that nine respondents said they do not often experience difficulties when chatting.

Speaking

The respondents spoke about difficulties that they experience when speaking English to communicate online. They often indicated that one's accent was a cause for difficulties. This could apply to the respondent's accent as well as their interlocutor's accent. The respondents mentioned that both NS-accent and NNS-accent can cause difficulties. The following quotes are examples of difficulties that have to do with accents:

“R10: ... because of the accent, you notice that some words are pronounced differently from what we are used to ... and that makes it difficult to exactly understand which word it is about.” (Respondent 10).

“R11: Sometimes they [interlocutors] say the letters in a weird way, which makes understanding it difficult. It is kind of similar to the difference between the Flemish and Dutch ‘-g’.”

I: Do you mean that some sounds are pronounced differently?

R11: Yes, that. Sometimes words do not come through because of that and that can really bother me.” (Respondent 11).

“R17: With the British [people] it is often the British way of speaking and some words that I do not know.” (Respondent 17).

Respondents also pointed out that pronunciation could cause non-understandings, both caused by them and by their interlocutor. Of course, pronunciation can be related to one’s accent, but it can also have to do with the idea that a speaker is not sure on how to pronounce a word, which can cause confusion. Another difficulty with communication through speaking is that the respondent cannot come up with a word, which can cause an interruption in communication. Two respondents also mentioned that they can become insecure when they have to speak English. Four respondents indicated that they sometimes do not know how to say what they want to say in English.

Chatting

Nine respondents specifically mentioned that they usually do not experience difficulties when chatting, for example respondent 6:

“R6: I do not find it hard to understand people over chat. I do not have any difficulties with that.” (Respondent 6).

One respondent said that he often experiences problems when his interlocutor uses sarcasm when chatting. It can be difficult for him to recognize sarcasm. Another respondent mentioned that not being able to use gestures could cause difficulties. Furthermore, respondents mentioned spelling, typos, and use of unknown abbreviations as causes of difficulties when chatting.

In general

Respondents mentioned that not knowing the meaning of a word can cause difficulties. Ten respondents said that this was a difficulty that they caused themselves. Four respondents said that their interlocutors cause these difficulties. Constructing and structuring sentences were also specified to cause problems. Respondents said that they struggle with this themselves, but that their interlocutors also create confusion through this:

“R3: Well, they [foreign interlocutors over chat] do not use well constructed sentences. So sometimes I really have to read the sentence twice to understand what they mean.”
(Respondent 3).

Cultural differences were also said to cause problems within communication:

“R5: ... some jokes are for example inappropriate in the Brazilian culture, but not in the Dutch culture.” (Respondent 5).

Respondents also pointed out that interlocutors sometimes translate sentences or words literally from their native language, which can cause confusion. Furthermore, three respondents mentioned that it can be hard for them to understand their interlocutor when the interlocutor make too many mistakes. It is important to note that, in this case, the respondents defined what can be considered as a mistake.

Strategies

Respondents

Respondents mentioned several strategies that they practice during online interactions in English. One strategy was sending pictures to their interlocutor when the interlocutor cannot figure out how to explain something in words. Respondents also say they do this when there is a case of a cultural difference. One respondent, for example, said that he had trouble to explain what a tuna salad was to an Australian. Therefore, he sent a picture of the Dutch

version of a tuna salad. Another respondent had trouble with describing korfbal, since this sport was unknown to her Spanish interlocutor. She sent a picture to clarify what korfbal is. Using Google Translate was also mentioned as a strategy to solve problems. Respondents use it, for example, to find the right English word or to find the translation in their interlocutor's native language. These are examples of productive strategies. An example of a receptive strategy is when a respondent uses Google Translate to find the Dutch translation of a word or sentence that their interlocutor used. When speaking, respondents said they speak clearly and slowly to prevent or correct non-understandings:

“R10: ... it is important to speak clearly and calmly; it usually goes much better then.” (Respondent 10).

Respondents also mentioned that they use synonyms when their interlocutor does not understand them. Receptive strategies are asking for repetition or explanation. Repeating and explaining are also used as productive strategies by respondents:

“R7: I ask them to repeat a part of their sentence or story or I just let it pass...” (Respondent 7).

“R17: ... when it is necessary, I ask for clarification or I ask what they mean.” (Respondent 17).

“R19: I will use a synonym of the word they do not understand, or I just explain it in a different way.” (Respondent 19).

Shifting from speaking to chatting when non-understandings occur was also referred to as a strategy:

“I: Does it happen that someone really does not understand you?”

R1: Yes, that can happen, that is usually because of the way I pronounce words or because the other person is not from an English-speaking country. We then continue our conversation in chat.” (Respondent 1).

Three respondents furthermore pointed out that they code-switch when difficulties arise. Respondent 1, for example, can switch to French and respondent 7 sometimes switches to Spanish. Respondent 23 mentioned the following situation which happened in a multiplayer game:

“R23: Recently, a boy started to swear in German. Then, I also spoke German to scare him. That was funny because he did not know that other people were able to understand him.” (Respondent 23).

Interlocutor

Respondents also mentioned strategies that their interlocutors use to correct issues. These strategies were explaining and offering help, which can be considered as productive strategies. The respondents within this study mentioned only a few strategies that their interlocutors use:

“R10: ... I noticed that they were understanding [of me not understanding them] and they started speaking less business-like and more slowly and clearly.” (Respondent 10).

“I: How do they [interlocutors] respond when you tell them you do not understand them?”

R19: Then, they usually speak more slowly and with a better accent.” (Respondent 19).

School

Focus in class

Respondents were asked what they learn or pay attention to in their English classes. They often mentioned grammar as a key component within their English classes. Listening, speaking, and reading skills were also brought up. Most respondents, 22, pointed out that the focus in class lies on British English. Many respondents also said that their teacher speaks with a British accent:

“R1: ... our teacher speaks with a British accent, which is nice, because then I can learn something from it.” (Respondent 1).

“R20: [classes focus] on a lot of things: a lot of grammar, pronunciation, listening exercises, translating and doing as much as possible in English.” (Respondent 20).

“R23: [classes focus] mostly on grammar and learning vocabulary.” (Respondent 23).

Diversity

When the respondents were asked if they learn about other varieties that exist in the English language, 14 of them said no. Two respondents mentioned that they have had a project that incorporated other varieties. Eight respondents did not specify whether they experience attention to diversity. When the respondents were asked if they would like to learn about different varieties and diversity within English, 14 said yes and eight said no. Ten thought it could be useful, while eight thought it would not be useful:

“R2: I do not think it will be very useful. But it would give you a more extensive view on a language.” (Respondent 2).

“R9: I think it could be useful. Then, I think it would be easier for me to communicate with people from, for example, China or Italy” (Respondent 9).

Wishes for change

The respondents were asked if they wanted to make adjustments to their English classes. Options for changes were more attention to interaction and speaking, less attention to grammar, but even so more attention to grammar, and more challenging classes. Some answers focused on grading; one respondent thought that the focus in class should be less on grading, and one proposed that grading should be done according to the CEFR system.

“I: Would you like to make changes to your English classes?”

R6: Yes, mostly more [attention to] speaking during classes. I think I could learn more from that. My English teacher also speaks a lot of Dutch [during classes].” (Respondent 6).

Connection

When respondents were asked to compare their use of English inside the classroom to their use outside the classroom, four respondents mentioned that they experience a strong link between the two. Other respondents mentioned differences. Differences were for example that the respondents experience a more prominent focus on grammar in class, that their use outside the classroom is more informal, and that British English is used inside the classroom, while American English is used outside the classroom.

“R20: ... We only learn British English and if there are American words in the vocabulary lists, we have to learn them in British.

I: And how do you feel about that?

R20: It’s okay, but sometimes I feel like I would benefit more from American English since there are more Americans (I think) and I hear it [American English] more often on YouTube and Instagram.” (Respondent 20).

Some respondents also mentioned that they feel more at ease when they use English outside the classroom:

“R4: I dare to say more outside of school because then I know that I will not be judged on my English.” (Respondent 4).

Attitudes

Respondents expressed several attitudes during the interviews, for example about accents. Four respondents mentioned that Scottish accents are hard to understand and five mentioned that French accents are hard to understand. On the other hand, five respondents said that American accents are easy to understand. Four respondents mentioned that British accents are easy to understand, but four other respondents pointed out that they think British accents are hard to understand. When speaking about making mistakes, four respondents explicitly mentioned that they do not care about mistakes. Some of them argued that “everyone makes mistakes”:

“R22: I do not really care [about mistakes]. Everyone makes mistakes.” (Respondent 22).

Eleven respondents said that they never point out an interlocutor’s mistake. Respondents who do point them out do that because the error caused confusion or because they want to help. Some respondents considered the English language as a tool for communication and some said that intelligibility matters the most:

“R4: ... what matters is that you understand each other, no matter what type of English [is used].” (Respondent 4).

“R7: ... in the end, everyone makes mistakes. In this case, the English language is a tool used for communication.” (Respondent 7).

Respondents also expressed their teachers’ attitudes. Four respondents said that their teacher believes that it is not necessary for their students to obtain a certain accent in English:

“R3: I had a teacher last year who said a really good thing. He said that you do not need to have a British accent, as long as you are intelligible. I do not think accents matter.”
(Respondent 3).

Three respondents mentioned that their teachers have a strong preference for British English; one respondent even said that his teacher rejects American English:

“R11: [I get taught in] British English. Our teacher personally thinks that is better.”
(Respondent 11).

Some respondents expressed their disapproval of Dutch accents. They said that they prefer native-speaker accents:

“I: And how do you feel about possibly having a Dutch accent?”

R5: I think it sounds uglier than an American accent because it sounds like unnatural English.” (Respondent 5)

An individual but perhaps interesting outcome from an interview was the following answer:

“R5: ... I prefer getting taught in British or American English. I do not really want to be in contact with people whose native language is not English.” (Respondent 5)

Divergence

Respondents gave only a few examples that could be considered as divergence. One respondent mentioned that he sometimes leaves the chat when he and his interlocutor cannot achieve intelligibility. Another respondent said that it sometimes occurs that interlocutors within a multiplayer game remove a player who does not understand them. One respondent also said that interlocutors ignore requests for clarification or explanation.

Discussion

This study has explored Dutch teenagers' online communication in English. The respondents have been interviewed about problems and strategies that they encounter within these interactions. If these encounters can be connected to features of ELF will be discussed in this section. The respondents' experiences with their ELT classes will also be discussed.

Within ELF interactions, strategies as accommodation are often used (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Walker & Zoghbor, 2015). The results of this study show that Dutch teenagers use accommodation strategies to overcome difficulties as non-understandings when they communicate in English in online settings. These strategies can be both receptive and productive. Examples of these productive strategies are repetition as a solution, code-switching, adapting speech and offering extra explanation. Receptive strategies are, for example, asking for repetition, explicitly stating that he/she did not understand, asking for clarity, and not responding to non-standard forms (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). These receptive strategies are used as indicators for non-understandings (Gass & Varonis, 1985). Many of these strategies are convergent with regard to accommodation (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). These aforementioned strategies have all been mentioned by this study's respondents. Cogo and Dewey (2012) also spoke about CS; there exist strategies that can be applied pre-realization and after-realization. Within this study, respondents rarely mentioned pre-realization strategies. There are a few exceptions: examples of pre-realization strategies that were found in this study include a respondent who immediately deletes her Dutch accent when she speaks English and a respondent who speaks slowly to prevent non-understandings. Most strategies that were mentioned can be regarded as after-realization strategies. Creativity can also be a feature of ELF communication (Deterding, 2013, p. 5). Examples of creativity also came forward in this study, for example sending pictures or shifting to chatting as strategies. Cooperation, as Firth (2009) mentioned, was not necessarily found within this study. Respondents did mention that they alter their accent to be more intelligible, but there was no

indication that they actively adapt their speech to their interlocutor's speech. Furthermore, Mauranen's (2018) notion of simplification was not explicitly found in this study.

Respondents indicated few examples of divergence. Jenks (2012) found that interactants within chatrooms are not always mutually supportive and sometimes highlight errors or non-standard forms. This study found only a few examples that support this statement. Most respondents within this study indicated that they and their interlocutors try to accommodate and that they do not point out other's mistakes when that is not necessary: understanding each other is usually the priority. This is in line with Deterding (2013).

Problems that occur within ELF communication often have to do with non-understandings (Deterding, 2013). This study found that the respondents encounter several difficulties, which can be related to one's accent or pronunciation, sentence structures, not knowing words or not coming up with words. According to the respondents, these factors often caused non-understandings. Respondents furthermore indicated that accent plays a role in both NS-NNS communication and NNS-NNS communication when they discussed difficulties. This supports Meierkord's (2012) and Deterding's (2013) ideas that NSs of English can also be hard to understand for NNSs of English. According to Derwing and Munro (2009), speakers with a strong accent can possibly still be easy to understand. However, within this research, an interlocutor's accent or pronunciation was often said to cause problems.

The results from this study are also in line with Edwards (2014b) and Walker and Zoghbor (2015) who noted that within ELT, classes are often focused on native-speaker models. This was also the case in the current study, since most respondents indicated that their English classes in secondary school are focused on British English and sometimes on American English. Furthermore, this study found that English classes rarely focus on diversity within English. The majority of the respondents said that they would like to learn more about

diversity within English, which is in agreement with many scholars who plead for more attention to varieties of English within the ELT classroom (e.g. Sifakis et al., 2018).

Matsumoto (2011) furthermore believes that exposing students to variety within English can have positive outcomes. The respondents' opinions within this study are generally in line with Matsumoto's (2011) suggestions.

Grau (2009) argued that the out of school use of English among teenagers might differ from the in-class use. Findings in this study support that Dutch teenagers experience differences when they are asked to make comparisons. Examples of these differences are that many respondents think their classes focus on grammar, while it was also the case that respondents often do not value correct use of grammar in online situation. This is in line with Deterding's (2013) notion that ELF interactants may prioritize getting their message across over standard use of grammar. Other differences were more informal use online, more use of American English online, and fear of judgment in class. These findings correspond to Grau's study (2009) in which she exposed a contrast between teenagers' use of English outside and inside the classroom. Respondents also wanted to make changes to their English classes. Examples of desired changes are more challenging classes and more attention to speaking and interaction. It should be noted that there is a high possibility that the respondents within this study have a high competence in English, since they use the language a lot and seem to be interested in it, since they agreed to participate in this study. Therefore, the implications for changes they have given may not be representative for all secondary school students.

Limitations

This study was carried out with a qualitative approach using interviews. These interviews were focused on the opinions and perspectives of Dutch teenagers. Difficulties and strategies have been explored with a focus on what the respondents think they encounter. Since their interactions and English classes have not been analyzed by the researcher, it is not completely

certain that these encounters were not biased. Therefore, within this study, it is important to realize that the focus lay on the respondents' experiences. Another potential problem is the idea that it might be hard for respondents to indicate the difficulties and strategies they use. Therefore, it might be the case that not all difficulties and strategies that in reality occur have been mentioned in the results of this study. Watterson (2008, p. 384) also noted that a "problem may escape the notice of speakers and listeners", which can furthermore suggest that not all non-understandings or difficulties have been mentioned by the respondents within this study.

Follow-up research

Further research might explore and analyze the online interactions that Dutch teenagers have in English. With this, a linguistic analysis (Ishikawa & Jenkins, 2019) could be carried out to investigate which ELF features come through in online youth communication. Further research might also examine opinions of English teachers in the Netherlands with concern to their take on ELF and inclusion of diversity within English in the classroom. Many scholars, as Sifakis et al. (2018), give implications on how ELF can be incorporated in the classroom. Further studies can focus on the possibilities within secondary schools in the Netherlands.

Conclusion

This study focused on Dutch teenagers' online communication in English and whether they encounter features of ELF communication. Through analyzing 24 interviews with Dutch teenagers who often use English in online situations, research question one "what features of ELF communication do Dutch teenagers encounter within online communication, when using English to interact with people who have a different L1-background?" can be answered. Within this study, findings can confirm that Dutch teenagers encounter features of ELF when they use English for online communication. Online communication concerns both speaking

and chatting. Situations in which English is used can include social media or gaming platforms. Respondents mentioned strategies and difficulties that earlier studies connect to ELF communication. These strategies involve accommodation strategies as repetition, adaptation and code-switching to ensure intelligibility. Respondents furthermore indicated that they encounter difficulties that have to do with non-understandings, which are often caused by accent and sentence structure. In conclusion, Dutch teenagers possibly use and encounter features of ELF in their online communication. They generally do not care much about adhering to native-speaker standards and they actively practice strategies to overcome difficulties.

This study's second research question "do Dutch teens experience a difference in their encounters with ELF features when comparing outside and inside classroom situations?" can furthermore be answered. The current study finds that Dutch teenagers suppose that the focus within their ELT classes lies on native-speaker varieties, usually British English. Little attention to other varieties within English is provided. This is not the case in online situations, in which the respondents are often interacting with NNSs of English. This means that they are also exposed to NNS-accent and varieties outside the classroom. There is a wish for changes in the ELT classroom and a wish for more attention to diversity. For example, the respondents desire more attention to communication in their ELT classes. This study also argues that the link between the ELT classroom and the outside-classroom situations is not very strong since many differences between the two were mentioned and since many suggestions for improvement were implied. Further research might investigate if an implementation of ELF awareness in the Dutch ELT classrooms can be realized.

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Appendix

I. Request for participation

Hoi! Bedankt voor je interesse in mijn onderzoek. Ik doe onderzoek naar Nederlandse jongeren die de Engelse taal vaak online gebruiken. Hier schrijf ik mijn scriptie over. Het is belangrijk dat je eerste taal Nederlands is en dat je tussen de 12 en 18 jaar oud bent. Als je meedoet, ga je akkoord met een eenmalig interview wat we via de chat kunnen houden. Dit interview zal ongeveer 30 tot 40 minuten duren. Je blijft anoniem, ik zal je naam nergens gebruiken. Als je ergens geen antwoord op wilt geven tijdens het interview, mag je dat natuurlijk aangeven. Ook kunnen we elk moment stoppen als je niet verder wilt gaan met het interview. Als je hier akkoord mee gaat, geef je toestemming dat ik je antwoorden mag verwerken in mijn onderzoek. Ik hoor graag van je! Groeten, Maxime

II. Topic list

a) Achtergrondinformatie

- Hoe oud ben je?
- In welke klas zit je?
- Welk schoolniveau doe je?

b) Gebruik van Engels

- In welke situaties gebruik je Engels?
- Op welke platforms gebruik je Engels?
- Hoe vaak gebruik je Engels?

c) Interactie

- Met wie communiceer je?
- Waar komen de mensen waarmee je communiceert vandaan?
- Wat is de moedertaal van de mensen waarmee je communiceert?
- Hoe communiceer je? (chatten of spreken?)

d) Moeilijkheden

- In hoeverre ervaar je wel eens moeilijkheden tijdens het communiceren?
- Wat voor moeilijkheden zijn dit?
 - o In hoeverre maak je mee dat je iemand niet begrijpt? Waar kan dit aan liggen?
 - o In hoeverre maak je mee dat iemand jou niet begrijpt? Waar kan dit aan liggen?
- Wat voor moeilijkheden ervaar je tijdens het chatten?
- Wat voor moeilijkheden ervaar je tijdens het spreken?
- Waar denk je dat die moeilijkheden door ontstaan?

e) Strategieën

- In hoeverre probeer je moeilijkheden op te lossen?
- Wat doe je om moeilijkheden op te lossen?
 - o Wat doe je als je iemand niet begrijpt?
 - o Wat doe je als iemand jou niet begrijpt?
- Wat doet degene waarmee je communiceert als hij/zij jou niet begrijpt?
- Wat doe je als iemand een ‘foutje’ maakt?

f) School

- Hoe zien de lessen Engels er bij jou op school uit?
- Waar focussen de lessen zich op?
- In hoeverre wordt er wel eens aandacht besteed aan andere varianten of diversiteit binnen het Engels?
 - o Weinig? Zou je meer diversiteit willen zien? Zou je daar wat over willen leren?
- Zou je iets willen veranderen aan de lessen Engels?
- In hoeverre ervaar jij verschillen in hoe je het Engels binnen en buiten de les gebruikt?

g) Overig

- Zijn er dingen die we nog niet besproken hebben?

III. Codes

Name	Files	References
Online situation		
Gaming	12	13
Chatting	12	
Speaking	9	
Both	9	
Social media	16	18
Chatting	14	
Speaking	9	
Both	9	
Ways of interaction		
Chatting	22	29
Speaking (calling, video calling)	15	15
Interaction		
With native speakers		
Canada	2	2
USA	6	6
England	7	7
Scottish	1	1

Australian	1	1
With non-native speakers		
Italy	2	2
Spain	4	4
Sweden	1	1
Denmark	1	1
Lebanon	1	1
Russian	1	1
Hungary	1	1
Germany	3	3
Indonesia	1	1
India	1	1
Norway	1	1
Austria	1	1
French	2	2
Unknown	5	5
With Dutch speakers in English	3	3
Difficulties (respondent says they caused)		
Specific to chatting		
Non-native interlocutor		
Respondent uses abbreviation unknown to I.	1	1
Native interlocutor		
All interlocutors		
Spelling	1	1
Typo	1	1
Interpreting sarcasm	1	1
Not being able to use gestures	1	1
Respondent experiences few difficulties	9	10
Specific to speaking		
Non-native interlocutor		
Native interlocutor		
All interlocutors		
Interruption	1	1
Respondent becomes insecure	2	3
Non-understanding because of pronunciation	3	3
Respondent's accent	6	8
Respondent does not know how to say something	4	4
Respondent speaks too fast	1	1
In general		
Non-native interlocutor		
Respondent uses difficult word	1	1
Native interlocutor		
Respondent uses wrong word	1	1
All interlocutors		
Respondent translates literally	1	1
Respondent does not know a word	10	11
Respondent uses "general 'you'"	1	1
Respondent has difficulty with expressing feelings	1	1
Not coming up with words	5	5
Forming sentences	5	5
Sentence structure	4	4
Intercultural		
Explaining things unknown to interlocutor	2	2
Making jokes	2	2
Interpreting wrongly because of cultural difference	4	4

	Speaking clearly	3	3
	Speaking slowly	3	3
	“Deleting” own accent	1	1
	Starting over when being unclear	2	2
	Adapting to NS accent	1	1
	Receptive		
	Both		
	Shifting to chat	2	3
In general			
	Accommodation: Convergence		
	Productive		
	Synonyms	5	5
	Repeating (solution)	6	6
	Explaining	8	8
	Describing	2	2
	Code-switching	3	3
	Receptive		
	Responding to errors		
	To help people	3	3
	When it causes confusion	6	6
	No	11	12
	Asking for repetition (signal)	8	11
	Asking for clarity / explanation	4	4
	Offering help	4	5
	Letting it pass	1	3
	Admitting that they do not understand	3	3
	Analyzing context	3	3
	Analyzing other people’s reactions	2	2
	Changes subject	2	2
Divergence			
	Respondent leaves chat	1	1
	Respondent ignores request	1	1
Strategies (from interlocutor)			
	Specific for chatting		
	Accommodation: Convergence		
	Productive		
	Sending picture	1	1
	Receptive		
	Specific for speaking		
	Accommodation: Convergence		
	Productive		
	Speaking clearly	2	2
	Speaking slowly	2	2
	Receptive		
In general			
	Accommodation: Convergence		
	Productive		
	Repeating (solution)	2	2
	Explaining	5	5
	Describing	1	1
	Receptive		
	Responding to errors		
	Yes	2	2
	To help people	1	1
	Offering help	4	4

Letting it pass	1	1
Looking for translation	2	2
Divergence		
Interlocutor ignores request for explanation	1	1
Person who does not understand is removed from group	1	1
Other		
Other Dutch speaker helps respondent in group chat	1	1
Attitudes		
Accents		
Hard to understand		
Scottish	4	4
New-Zealand	1	1
British	4	4
French	5	7
Indian	2	2
Slavic	1	1
Asian	1	1
Australian	1	1
Irish	1	1
NNS in general	1	1
Easy to understand		
American	5	5
British	4	4
French	1	1
Scandinavian	1	3
Finnish	1	1
Dutch	1	1
Negative		
Dutch	1	1
British	1	1
Positive		
Scottish	1	1
Australian	1	1
Varieties		
“Good”		
British	3	4
American	1	2
Making mistakes		
Respondent		
“Everyone makes mistakes”	4	4
Accent matters		
Yes	1	1
No	3	3
Intelligibility matters	3	3
English		
English = tool	4	4
School		
Wishes for change		
More interaction / speaking	8	12
Smaller focus on grading	1	1
Grading with ERK	1	1
Teacher should speak more English	1	1
Less grammar	3	3

More grammar	3	3
More variety in accents	1	1
More attention to formal English	1	1
More attention to pronunciation	1	1
More challenging classes	4	6
More projects	1	1
Focus on AmE instead of BrE	1	1
No	5	5
Diversity in class		
Little diversity	14	14
Some diversity	2	2
A project	2	2
Other accents during tests	1	1
Much diversity		
Wishes for more diversity		
Yes	14	15
No	8	8
Useful		
Yes	10	12
Maybe	1	1
No	8	8
Teacher's opinions		
Accent matters	1	1
Accent does not matter	4	4
Intelligibility matters	1	1
Strong preference for British English	3	3
Rejecting American English	1	1
Variety used in classroom		
British English	22	24
American English	8	8
Focus during English classes		
Speaking	5	5
Discussions	1	1
Giving presentations	2	3
Pronunciation	3	3
Writing	4	4
Creative writing	1	1
Spelling	1	1
Listening	8	8
Watching	2	2
Grammar	13	13
Reading	5	5
Vocabulary	7	7
Translating	1	1
Culture	2	2
Projects	3	5
Comparing English in school – practice		
Weak link	2	2
Strong link	4	5
Differences		
More formal use in class	3	3
Fear of judgment in class	2	2
More 'precise' use in class	2	2
Less focus on grammar outside class	2	2
Using English outside class is easier	2	2

BrE in class, AmE outside	3	3
Dutch accent in class, BrE outside	1	1
No differences	1	1